

Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors in Detroit, Michigan
June 25, 2001

Well, thank you all very much. Thanks. Please be seated. Well, Victor, thank you very much. I appreciate your kind remarks.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce the First Lady. She and I are coming up from Crawford, Texas, on our way back to the Nation's Capital, and we're so honored that you all would welcome us here: Laura Bush.

Traveling with me, as well, is the Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao, the FEMA Director, Joe Allbaugh. I hope you don't have to call him. *[Laughter]* But if you do, I can assure you, he'll be responsive.

I'm honored to be here with my friend the Governor of Michigan and Michelle Engler. I appreciate, Brent, so much, seeing you again, and I thank all the mayors for your hospitality.

Traveling with me, as well, are members of the United States congressional delegation: Tony Hall, J.C. Watts, Joe Knollenberg, Jim Ramstad, and right here from her own district, Carolyn Kilpatrick. I also had the pleasure of meeting and visiting with the newest mayor on the block, Mayor Jim Hahn of Los Angeles.

It's good to see the mayors from the great State of Texas. I see the mayor from Fort Worth and the mayor from Dallas. I suspect the mayor from Houston is somewhere around here—oh, there he is. Hi, Lee. Thank you all very much. There's another mayor—thank you, Mayor. I remember you. I hope you remember me. *[Laughter]* It's good to see you all.

I also want to thank the mayor of Detroit for his hospitality. I'm reminded of what President Kennedy said about Columbus, Ohio. He said, "There's no city in America where I get a warmer welcome and receive less votes." *[Laughter]* I think because of that, the mayor likes me—and in spite of that, I like the mayor. *[Laughter]*

Detroit was the site of this organization's birth, 69 years ago, when Mayor Frank Murphy and 29 of his colleagues met here in this city. In that year, in 1932, one-third of Americans were unemployed; food lines stretched for blocks; nearly 40 percent of America's banks had failed. Today, the story is very different. American cities are once again a magnet for ambition and culture and enterprise. The welfare rolls are down. In some places, crime rates have fallen to what they were in the mid-1960s. Problems that once seemed hopeless have yielded to reform and good sense, and the mayors of America deserve much of the credit.

Yet, as we all know, tremendous challenges still remain. Too many children, through no fault of their own, are in families without fathers and neighborhoods without opportunity. Too many young people drop out of school, drop out of the labor force, and end up in prisons. Too many men and women wander alone in the twilight of addiction, illiteracy, and mental illness.

These problems seem immune to our affluence. We're not in a post-poverty America. The challenges we face are different than they were in the 1930s, and we must recognize new challenges demand new approaches. I realize that many of you are doing an outstanding job of dealing with these problems and that the burden cannot fall upon you alone. The Federal Government should take your side. The cities and communities of America need to be empowered, not regimented. And this is my firm commitment to you, the mayors.

The agenda is long and very important. Equal opportunity is an empty hope without good schools. So the education reform legislation passed by both the House and

the Senate spreads power to local communities and, for the first time, demands results in return. It's time to act when we find that children who graduate from high school have only an eighth grade education. He's been betrayed by the adult world, and we must end that betrayal by having high expectations, strong accountability systems, and the resources necessary to make sure that not one child gets left behind in America.

In the aftermath of successful welfare reform, we must turn to the problems of the working poor, especially the newly working poor. We're encouraging homeownership by providing tax credits to investors to redevelop and build new single-family homes. We're facilitating homeownership for low-income families by allowing them to consolidate a year's worth of Section 8 assistance for a downpayment on a home.

We believe owning something is a part of the American future. We want all people, regardless of background, to be able to claim a home of their own in America. I can't think of anything better to help revitalize the neighborhoods in America's cities.

We must actively work to fill the gaps in the health care system for the working poor. That's why the budget I've sent up to Congress provides resources to expand significantly the number of community health centers to make sure that all folks have got an opportunity for good primary care, and proposes a new tax credit for those who have difficulty affording health insurance.

I'm convinced that we can make progress on the important issues. Today I want to focus on one in particular: supporting the good works of charities and neighborhood healers, empowering communities to meet their own needs and to care for their own members.

In every city, there are people who mentor and tutor, who give shelter to battered women and children, who teach biological fathers to be real and caring fathers, who

help young people find jobs and avoid violence, who confront—who comfort the aged and help the dying, who picket crackhouses, who walk into gunfire to end gang wars. These good people don't lack compassion. They certainly don't lack courage. They don't lack commitment and spiritual strength. But often they lack resources. And I believe government, where it can, should stand side by side and to help them.

This belief isn't owned by Republicans or Democrats. It doesn't fit into neat, ideological categories. It demands an active government to support the good works of others, an active government to spread resources and authority beyond government entirely.

In articulating his philosophy of how to aid American cities, Robert Kennedy said, "There must be an overriding theme and goal: the involvement of the community, of those who have the greatest stake in the quality of the services they receive." He spoke about putting community at the center of all our policy. He said, "Government back to the people of the neighborhood." I agree. In the 21st century, we should bring government back to the people who have a powerful sense of mission and idealism, back to people who know the needs of neighbors, back to people committed to rebuilding their communities from the inside out.

These committed men and women take the side of hope and compassion. And we must take their side. We must help those in need, and we must encourage people to be good citizens instead of bystanders. So I'm pleased that more than 150 mayors' offices across the country are launching their own efforts to encourage faith and community initiatives in partnership with the White House.

I'm honored the U.S. Conference of Mayors has strongly endorsed my administration's Faith-Based and Community Initiative. I'm extremely proud to announce that Rosa Parks, a monumental figure in

the civil rights movement, has endorsed the initiative. These are unprecedented votes of confidence. They're important steps in our efforts to bring healing and hope to those in need.

I'm excited about this approach, yet, I'm under no illusions. I know government cannot be replaced by charities. The best mentoring program will never be a substitute for Medicaid for poor children. The best effort to renovate housing will never be a substitute for fair-housing laws. Charities and community groups cannot do everything. But we strongly believe they can do more. We must find creative ways to expand their size and increase their number. And now is the time to start.

I proposed a new initiative to mentor the children of prisoners, so they are not further punished for the sins of their parents. I have proposed expanding federally funded after-school programs, so that faith-based and community-based programs can access that money. I proposed a Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, aiding community groups that seek to strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of families.

And soon, the United States House of Representatives will act on H.R. 7, the "Community Solutions Act," sponsored by Republican J.C. Watts and Democrat Tony Hall. The bill contains important elements of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, and I hope you'll make your support of this legislation known to the skeptics in the United States Senate and to the United States House. H.R. 7 expands individual development accounts, which provide a way for charities, government, and business to help struggling families find the security of assets and the dignity of independence.

The bill allows non-itemizing Federal taxpayers to join itemizers in deducting their charitable contributions, a step that should encourage new charitable giving all across America. The "Community Solution Act" also expands charitable choice, the principle already established in Federal law that faith-based organizations should be able to

compete for Government funds without being forced to hide their religious character.

We recognize that the funds will be spent on social services, not worship services. And we recognize there must be secular alternatives for those who wish to use the services. We respect the separation of church and state and the constitutional rights of religious people. But the days of discriminating against religious institutions simply because they are religious must come to an end if we want to heal America.

As you know, many community groups are not religious in nature. Their employees and volunteers are motivated by kind hearts and moral convictions. Yet, many acts of charity and social justice are also the acts of faith. And in our cities, they are often associated with African American churches. More than 70 percent of African American churches engage in community outreach programs, including daycare, job search, substance abuse prevention, food and clothing distribution. They're far more likely to apply for public funds for their social programs than other churches. And the people who most often benefit from the outreach efforts of these African American churches are poor children who are not affiliated with any church at all. In some places, African American churches are the only institutions that hold the fraying strands of a community together. And their work should be praised and welcomed and encouraged.

I've heard the voices, and so have you, the critics who are concerned about supporting good works, motivated by strong faith. I suggest they go to the cities to see the need and to see the hope. I suggest they talk to the forward-thinking mayors, mayors who are on the frontline, who work closely with faith and community organizations, who are witnesses to the power of this approach.

Your witness is in Philadelphia, where Mayor John Street supports the Amachi program, directed by former Mayor Wilson

Goode, which recruits mentors to care for the children of prisoners.

Your witness is in Orlando, where earlier this month Mayor Glenda Hood announced her faith-based and community matching grants program. That program focuses on funding youth and family projects that contribute to civic responsibility and character development.

Your witness is in Indianapolis, where my good friend Steve Goldsmith, when he was the mayor, pioneered the Front Porch Alliance, a partnership between city hall and the values shaping institutions in Indianapolis that helped transform this city. And thank you for being here today, Steve.

You know that childcare vouchers are used at houses of worship. You know the Head Start Programs are often found in religious settings. You know that many public services in our cities are provided through Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army. You know that many Government dollars in Medicaid and Medicare are used in religious hospitals. In all these cases, we are funding the good works of the faithful, not faith itself. Do the critics of this approach really want to end these programs? I certainly hope not. It would be bad for America.

I understand, mayors, my administration did not invent the idea of community empowerment. But along with you, we're going to build on it. Together, we're going to convince the skeptics. Together, we're going to put the Federal Government and local government squarely on the side of America's armies of compassion.

There are great stories in every great city, stories of grand ambition and immigrant enterprise and cultural achievement. There are also stories of suffering, redeemed by hope and faith, and we should listen to those stories as well.

The Brightmore neighborhood in northwest Detroit can be a tough place to grow up. Some people even ask, "Can anything good come out of Brightmore?" Well, it turns out that much good does come out

of that neighborhood. At Rosedale Park Baptist Church, a group of young men and women have committed their lives to bringing hope to young African Americans. And one of the young men they've helped is Demarco Howard.

Demarco's dad had been in prison since he was a baby. His mom was addicted to drugs and was unable to raise him, so his aunt took on the responsibility, and she did the very best job she could possibly do. But life was tough. Demarco was shot when he was 6 and spent a year in the hospital recovering. He was often in trouble, and at the age of 14 was arrested and sent to a juvenile detention facility. At that facility, Demarco met someone on the staff of Rosedale Park Baptist Church. Demarco began attending Bible study classes, and his life began to change in dramatic ways.

He goes to school; he does his homework; he goes to church; and he volunteers to help other kids in trouble. I had a chance to look Demarco in the eye and thank him for his leadership, and asked him how life was. And he said, "It's getting a lot better, Mr. President." Thank you for coming, Demarco.

America can be saved, one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. The pastor of Rosedale, Dennis Talbert, is fond of quoting a passage from the Book of Romans: "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." That accurately describes the situation of many of our children in America. Evil is what his church is fighting against, with impressive results. And it's worth noting that Rosedale's outreach programs are financially supported by the Department of Justice and Michigan's Family Independence Agency, among others, and it shows what is possible.

Stories like these are being written all across America, and it's the goal of this administration to praise them at every chance and to replicate them where we can. I hope you continue your good works as mayors. You're on the frontline. At least in Washington, we don't have to worry

about how the garbage gets emptied. [Laughter] But at least in Washington—we can work in Washington to make sure the garbage gets changed. We can make sure that we think differently about the problems that confront us. We can make sure we ask the question, “What are the results,” not “What is the process?” And together, we can rally the great compassion and faith and hope of America.

Thank you for what you do, and thank you for giving me the chance to come by and say hello. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:19 p.m. in the Columbus Ballroom at the Detroit Marriott Renaissance Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Victor Ashe of Knoxville, TN, past president, and Mayor H. Brent Coles of Boise, ID, president, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Gov. John Engler of Michigan; Michelle Engler, wife of Governor Engler; Mayor Ronald Kirk of Dallas, TX; Mayor Kenneth L. Barr of Fort Worth, TX; Mayor Lee P. Brown of Houston, TX; and Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI.

Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring Presidential Scholars

June 25, 2001

Thank you very much. Okay, sit down. [Laughter] Except for you all. [Laughter] Mr. Secretary, thank you. The good folks from Houston know what I’m about to tell you is true. First of all, behave yourself. [Laughter] And secondly, I picked a true leader to run the Department of Education when I picked Rod Paige. He did a great job as the superintendent in Houston. He’s a no-nonsense kind of guy, you know, and he’s getting a lot done. And I’m honored to have you here.

And Bruno, thank you very much. As the Chairman, I appreciate your leadership. And I want to thank all the members on the Commission. Thank you for taking time out of your private lives to herald the best of America. I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who are here. I understand John Hostettler is here from Indiana and George Nethercutt from Washington and Bernie Sanders from the State of Vermont. I think they’re here. Thank you all for coming.

It’s an honor for me to be here to honor some of America’s finest students. You all should be proud of this award, and you should know your country is proud of you. Congratulations.

Out of an applicant pool of over 2,700 exceptional students, 141 were chosen. While your excellence ranges from science to the arts, all of you share some common traits of character: hard work, commitment, leadership, faith in yourself, and service to others. You represent the best of your generation, and I’m confident you’ll do great things for our great Nation.

You’ve earned your place here today, but you did not do it alone. First, we want to thank the parents and family members who worked side by side with you. I want to thank you for your commitment to your kids and to their excellence.

And I want to thank the teachers who join us here today. A good teacher is a model and a mentor, a source of praise and a source of challenge. A good teacher can change a life. A generation of good teachers can change a nation. Our Nation deeply respects your important work, and thank you for being here.

You all have come to Washington in an historic time: The Congress is about to pass the most important education reform in nearly 40 years. Every school, with students of every income, will be expected to meet high standards of learning and literacy.